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John Kline: Why a loan to Iraq just won't work

John Kline

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Each day our troops make progress toward the rebuilding of a safe and secure Iraq. Working hand in hand with the Iraqi people and their neighbors in the region, our men and women have established the credibility and the relationships necessary to ensure their continued safety and success.

Unfortunately, the actions of some in Congress threaten to undermine these essential relationships and put our troops in greater danger.

While in the Middle East this month, I had the opportunity to meet with the men and women of our armed services as well as cabinet-level officials. Throughout Turkey, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iraq, the message was consistent: "Iraq needs your help, and we want to be sure of your commitment."

In recent weeks my colleagues and I in Congress have demonstrated our willingness to help by voting to provide \$21 billion in financial assistance. While the House of Representatives voted to provide these funds as a grant, a slight majority in the Senate approved the provision of \$10 billion of the request as a loan. By demanding repayment, these individuals call our commitment into question and destroy both our credibility in the region and our ability to negotiate with the world community.

The men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Coalition Provisional Authority have been able to work side-by-side with the Iraqi people to rebuild their nation because we have clearly demonstrated our pure motives of helping them create a stable, secure democracy. The moment we ask for repayment we lose these essential relationships. A vocal minority in this evolving region have already demonstrated their desire to harm our troops and disparage our efforts. By requesting repayment, Congress would unwittingly give these anti-American elements the evidence for their claims that our only interest lies in controlling Iraq's oil money. Such suggestions would inflame the fears generated by years of suffering under the oppressive Saddam Hussein regime, creating a breeding ground for terrorists and increasing the likelihood of attacks against our troops.

By demanding repayment we would also eliminate any hope of securing

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further international assistance for our efforts. The unanimous vote by the United Nations Security Council to authorize a multinational peacekeeping force under American command places the president in a position to negotiate support from the world community. How can we expect other nations to contribute freely to the cause if we tie strings to our aid by demanding repayment? As a fiscal conservative I can see the appeal of offering assistance as a loan, but as an American I cannot fathom placing our troops in additional danger in the name of "fiscal restraint."

We must not forget the lessons of history. Negligent policies following World War I created the instability and extremism that gave rise to World War II. We learned a valuable lesson from this fatal mistake: By implementing the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe's devastated economies following World War II, we revitalized a war-torn continent into the strong, democratic nations we recognize today.

Twenty-one billion dollars is a large request, but the loss of credibility and leverage in international negotiations would cost American taxpayers far more than \$21 billion in the long run. We must maintain our credibility and our ability to negotiate in order to continue making progress.

To diminish either by requesting repayment is to place our troops in greater danger and increase the potential for failure to meet our ultimate goals. And failure is something we cannot afford.

John Kline, a Republican, represents Minnesota's Second Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.



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